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REASON & REVELATION

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A close-up photograph of a hand holding a quill pen, writing on a scroll. The scroll is filled with text in a cursive script, likely Hebrew or Aramaic. The lighting is warm and focused on the pen and the text being written.

Has the **Bible**
Been **Transmitted**
To Us **Accurately?**

NEW

Book on
Mormonism

Balaam's
Talking
Donkey:
A **Fable?**

Has the Bible Been Transmitted To Us Accurately?

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

Article In Brief...

Though the books of the Bible were written millennia ago, abundant evidence exists by which one can know that they have been transmitted accurately through the centuries. The modern reader can be confident that—despite claims to the contrary by Muslims and others—the Bible has been adequately preserved from error and continues to serve the purpose God intends for it to serve.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is taken from Appendix 1 of the author's book *The Quran Unveiled*.]

THE science of textual criticism is a field of inquiry that has been invaluable in ascertaining the original reading of the New Testament text. Textual criticism involves “the ascertainment of the true form of a literary work, as originally composed and written down by its author.”¹ The fact that the original autographs do not exist,² and that only copies of copies of copies of the original documents have survived, has led some falsely to conclude that the original reading of the New Testament documents cannot be determined. For example, Mormons frequently attempt to establish the superiority of the *Book of Mormon* over the Bible by insisting that the Bible has been corrupted through the centuries in the process of translation (a contention shared by Islam in its attempt to explain the Bible's

frequent contradiction of the Quran). However, a venture into the fascinating world of textual criticism dispels this premature and uninformed conclusion.

The task of textual critics—those who study the extant manuscript evidence that attests to the text of the New Testament—is to examine **textual variants** (i.e., conflicting readings between manuscripts involving a word, verse, or verses) in an effort to reconstruct the original reading of the text. What has this field of inquiry concluded with regard to the integrity and genuineness of the Bible?

IS THE OLD TESTAMENT STILL RELIABLE?³

IF there are scribal errors in today's manuscript copies of the Old Testament, many wonder how we can be certain the text of the Bible was transmitted faithfully across the centuries. Is it not possible that it was

corrupted so that its form in our present Bible is drastically different from the original source?

The accuracy of the Old Testament text was demonstrated forcefully by the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls. Prior to 1947, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of significant length did not date earlier than the ninth century A.D. However, when the Dead Sea scrolls were found (containing portions of all Old Testament books except Esther), this discovery pushed the record of the Old Testament text back almost 1,000 years. These copies were produced sometime between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100. One scroll found in the Qumran caves was of particular importance. It was a scroll of the book of Isaiah, which had only a few words missing. What was amazing about this scroll is that when it was compared to the text of Isaiah produced 900 years after it, the two matched almost word for word, with only a few small variations. In commenting on this comparative reading of the two texts, A.W. Adams observed:

The close agreement of the second Isaiah Scroll from the Dead Sea with the manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries shows how carefully the text tradition which they represent has been preserved.... We may therefore be satisfied that the text of our Old Testament has been handed down in one line without serious change since the beginning of the Christian era and even before.⁴

Amazingly, a comparison of the standard Hebrew texts with that of the Dead Sea scrolls has revealed that the two are virtually identical. The variations (about 5%) occurred only in minor spelling differences and minute copyists' mistakes. Thus, as Rene Paché noted: “Since it can be demonstrated that the text of the Old Testament was accurately transmitted for the last 2,000 years, one may reasonably suppose that it

had been so transmitted from the beginning.”⁵

Even within the various passages of Scripture, numerous references to copies of the written Word of God can be found. A copy of the “book of the law” was discovered in the Temple during the days of King Josiah (c. 621 B.C.), thus demonstrating that Moses’ writings had been protected over a span of almost 1,000 years (2 Kings 22). Other Old Testament passages speak of the maintenance of the Holy Writings across the years (Jeremiah 36; Ezra 7:14; Nehemiah 8:1-18).

During Jesus’ personal ministry, He read from a scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, and called it “Scripture” (Luke 4:16-21)—a technical term employed in the Bible for a **divine** writing. Jesus endorsed the truth that the Old Testament Scriptures had been preserved faithfully. Even though Jesus read from a **copy** of Isaiah, He still considered it the Word of God. Hence, Scripture had been preserved faithfully in **written** form. Furthermore, even though Jesus condemned the scribes of His day for their many sins, never did He even intimate they were unfaithful in their work as scribes. Indeed, Jesus gave approval not only to copies, but even to translations (e.g., the Septuagint) of the Old Testament by reading and quoting from them.

One of the great language scholars of the Old Testament text was Dr. Robert Dick Wilson. A master of over 35 languages, Wilson carefully compared the text of the Old Testament with inscriptions on ancient monuments. As a result of his research, he declared: “We are scientifically certain that we have substantially the same text that was in the possession of Christ and the apostles and, so far as anybody knows, the same as that written by the original composers of the Old Testament documents.”⁶

IS THE NEW TESTAMENT STILL RELIABLE?

WHAT about the integrity of the New Testament? One may say unhesitatingly and confidently that the uncorrupted preservation of the New Testament has been thoroughly established. In evaluating the text of the New Testament, textual critics work with a large body of manuscript evidence, the amount of which is far greater than that available for any ancient classical author.⁷ As of 2018, the number of Greek manuscripts—whole and partial—that attest to the New Testament stands at an unprecedented 5,874.⁸ This figure does not include the other sources of evidence such as the superabundance of patristic citations and ancient versions. The best manuscripts of the New Testament are dated at roughly A.D. 350, with perhaps one of the most important of these being the Codex Vaticanus, “the chief treasure of the Vatican Library in Rome,” and the Codex Sinaiticus, which was purchased by the British from the Soviet Government in 1933.⁹ Additionally, the Chester Beatty papyri, made public in 1931, contain eleven codices

(manuscript volumes), three of which contain most of the New Testament (including the Gospel accounts). Two of these codices boast a date in the first half of the third century, while the third is slightly later, being dated in the last half of the same century.¹⁰ The John Rylands Library vaunts even earlier evidence. A papyrus codex containing parts of John 18 dates to the time of Hadrian, who reigned from A.D. 117 to 138.¹¹

Other attestation to the accuracy of the New Testament documents can be found in the writings of the so-called “apostolic fathers”—men who lived from A.D. 100 to 550, and who often quoted from the New Testament documents.¹² Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Tatian, Clement of Rome, and Ignatius (writing before the close of the second century) all provided citations from one or more of the Gospel accounts.¹³ Other witnesses to the authenticity of the New Testament are the Ancient Versions, which consist of the text of the New Testament translated into different languages. The Old Latin and the Old Syriac are the most ancient, being dated from the middle of the second century.¹⁴

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The fact is, the New Testament enjoys far more historical documentation than any other volume ever known. Compared to the 5,700⁺ Greek manuscripts authenticating the New Testament, there are only 643 copies of Homer's *Iliad*, which is undeniably the most famous book of ancient Greece. No one doubts the text of Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, but we have only 10 copies of it, the earliest of which was made 1,000 years after it was written. We have only two manuscripts of Tacitus' *Histories* and *Annals*, one from the ninth century and one from the eleventh. The *History of Thucydides*, another well-known ancient work, is dependent upon only eight manuscripts, the oldest of these being dated about A.D. 900 (along with a few papyrus scraps dated at the beginning of the Christian era). And *The History of Herodotus* finds itself in a similar situation. "Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest MSS [manuscripts—DM] of their works which are of any use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals."¹⁵ Thus Bruce declared: "It is a curious fact that historians have often been much readier to trust the New Testament records than have many theologians."¹⁶ Even as far back as 1968, Bruce Metzger, longtime professor of New Testament language and literature at Princeton, stated: "The amount of evidence for the text of the New Testament...is so much greater than that available for any ancient classical author that the necessity of resorting to emendation is reduced to the smallest dimensions."¹⁷ Truly, to have such abundance of copies for the New Testament from within 70 years of their writing is nothing short of astounding.¹⁸

In one sense, the work of the textual critic has been unnecessary,

since the vast majority of textual variants involve minor matters that do not affect doctrine as it relates to one's salvation. Even those variants that might be deemed doctrinally significant pertain to matters that are treated elsewhere in the Bible where the question of authenticity and originality is unobscured. No feature of Christian doctrine is at stake. As Ewert noted: "[V]ariant readings in our manuscripts do not affect any basic teaching of the NT."¹⁹

Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer wrote in agreement:

In fact, it has long been recognized by the foremost specialists in textual criticism that if any decently attested variant were taken up from the apparatus at the bottom of the page and were substituted for the accepted reading of the standard text, **there would in no case be a single, significant alteration in doctrine or message.**²⁰

Nevertheless, textual critics have been successful in demonstrating that **currently circulating New Testaments do not differ substantially from the original autographs.** When all of the textual evidence is considered, the vast majority of discordant readings have been resolved.²¹ One is brought to the firm conviction that we have in our possession the New Testament **as God intended.**

The world's foremost textual critics have confirmed this conclusion. Sir Frederic Kenyon, longtime director and principal librarian at the British Museum, whose scholarship and expertise to make pronouncements on textual criticism was second to none, stated: "Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."²² The late F.F. Bruce, longtime Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism at the University of Manchester, England, remarked: "The variant readings about which any doubt remains

among textual critics of the New Testament affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice."²³ J.W. McGarvey, declared by the *London Times* to be "the ripest Bible scholar on earth,"²⁴ conjoined: "All the authority and value possessed by these books when they were first written belong to them still."²⁵ And the eminent textual critics Westcott and Hort put the entire matter into perspective when they said:

Since textual criticism has various readings for its subject, and the discrimination of genuine readings from corruptions for its aim, discussions on textual criticism almost inevitably obscure the simple fact that variations are but secondary incidents of a fundamentally single and identical text. In the New Testament in particular it is difficult to escape an exaggerated impression as to the proportion which the words subject to variation bear to the whole text, and also, in most cases, as to their intrinsic importance. It is not superfluous therefore to state explicitly that **the great bulk of the words of the New Testament** stand out above all discriminative processes of criticism, because they **are free from variation**, and need only to be transcribed.²⁶

Writing over one hundred years ago in the late 19th century, and noting that the experience of two centuries of investigation and discussion had been achieved, these scholars concluded: "[T]he words in our opinion still subject to doubt **can hardly amount to more than a thousandth part of the whole** of the New Testament."²⁷ This means that 999/1000th of the text of the New Testament is the same today as when it came from the pens of the inspired writers. The miniscule portion that remains uncertain (1/1000th) consists of trivial details that have **no material effect on matters of faith or doctrine.** J.I. Packer, Board of Governors Professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, sum-

marized the facts: “[F]aith in the adequacy of the text is confirmed, so far as it can be, by **the unanimous verdict of textual scholars** that the biblical text is excellently preserved, and **no point of doctrine** depends on any of the small number of cases in which the true reading remains doubtful.”²⁸ Indeed, again in the words of textual scholar F.F. Bruce: “By the ‘singular care and providence’ of God the Bible text has come down to us in such substantial purity that even the most uncritical edition of the Hebrew or Greek...cannot effectively obscure the real message of the Bible, or neutralize its saving power.”²⁹ Therefore, the charge alleged by Muslims (and Mormons), that the Bible has been corrupted in transmission, is completely false.

THE QURAN COMPARED

ANYONE who has taken time to investigate the manuscript evidence that exists for ascertaining the original state of the Bible **knows** that we have the Bible in its near-original condition—a claim that has not been established for the Quran. The attention given to ascertaining the original state of the Quranic text pales in comparison to that given to the Bible in general, and the New Testament in particular. As John Gilchrist observed:

[T]here is no translation of the Qur’an to compare with translations of the Bible such as the Revised Standard Version or New American Standard Version. These were done by committees of scholars and the result has been a remarkably consistent and accurate rendering of the original. Every well-known translation of the Qur’an has been the work of an individual and, to one degree or another in every case, the value of the final product is tempered by the presence of the author’s own personal convictions and interpretations.³⁰

Of course, unsubstantiated claims are made for the transmission of the Quran: “[A]ll Muslims agree that the Quran is the verbatim revelation of God. They also agree about its text and content; that is, **no variant texts are found among any of the schools.**”³¹ The fact that Muslims **claim** unanimity of opinion regarding the purity of the Quranic text does not **prove** that the Quran has been exempt from the peculiar attribute of textual variation to which **all** documents from history are subject.

Ironically, the Quran itself offers both implicit and explicit endorsement of the integrity of the **biblical** text—at least in its condition at the time the Quran arose in the early seventh century:

And believe in that which I reveal, **confirming that which ye possess already (of the Scripture)**, and be not first to disbelieve therein, and part not with My revelations for a trifling price, and keep your duty unto Me. Confound not truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth.... Enjoin ye righteousness upon mankind while ye yourselves forget (to practice it)? And **ye are readers of the Scripture!** Have ye then no sense?.... O Children of Israel! Remember My favour wherewith I favoured you and how I preferred you to (all) creatures (*Surah* 2:41-42,44,47).³²

Or do they say, “He has forged it”? Say: “Had I forged it, then can you obtain no single (blessing) for me from Allah. He knows best of that whereof you talk (so glibly)! Enough is He for a witness between me and you! And He is Oft-For-giving, Most Merciful.” Say: “**I am no bringer of new-fangled doctrine among the Messengers,** nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I follow but that which is revealed to me; I am but a Warner open and clear.” Say: “Do you see? If (this teaching) be from Allah, and you reject it, and a witness from among the Children

of Israel testifies to **its similarity (with earlier scripture)**, and has believed while you are arrogant, (how unjust you are!). Truly, Allah does not guide a people unjust.” The Unbelievers say of those who believe: “If (this Message) were a good thing, (such men) would not have gone to it first, before us!” And seeing that they do not guide themselves thereby, they will say, “This is **an (old,) old falsehood!**” **And before this, was the Book of Moses as a guide and a mercy: and this Book confirms (it) in the Arabic tongue;** to admonish the unjust, and as Glad Tidings to those who do right.... “O our people! We have heard a Book revealed after Moses, **confirming what came before it**” (*Surah* 46:8-12,30).³³

Say: “O People of the Book! do you disapprove of us for no other reason than that **we believe in Allah, and the revelation that has come to us and that which came before (us)**, and (perhaps) that most of you are rebellious and disobedient?.... If only they had stood fast by **the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that was sent to them from their Lord**, they would have enjoyed happiness from every side. There is from among them a party on the right course: but many of them follow a course that is evil. O Messenger! proclaim the (Message) which has been sent to you from your Lord. If you did not, you would not have fulfilled and proclaimed His Mission. And Allah will defend you from men (who mean mischief). For Allah guides not those who reject Faith. Say: “O People of the Book! You have no ground to stand upon unless you stand fast by **the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord.**” It is the revelation that comes to you from your Lord, that increases in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. But you do not grieve over (these) people with-

(cont. on p. 116)

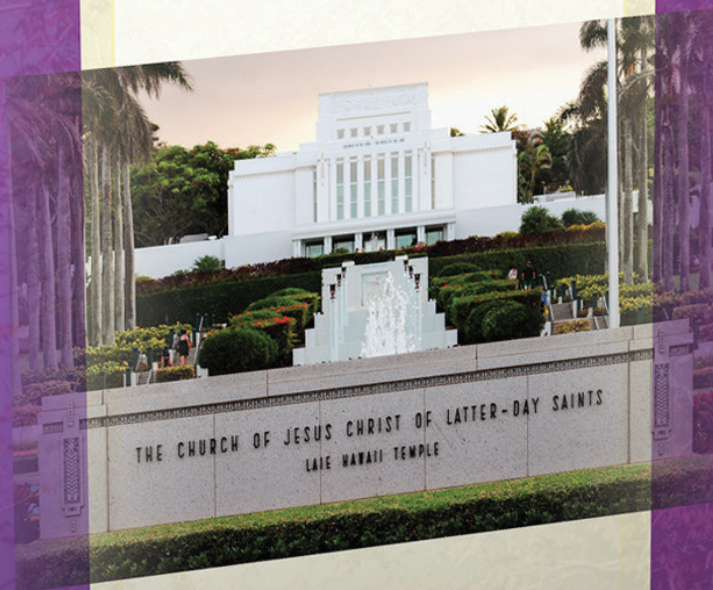
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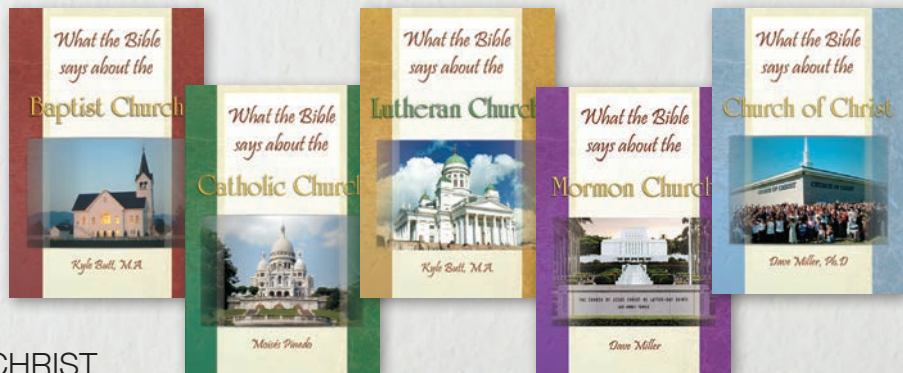
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out Faith. Those who believe (in the Qur'an), **those who follow the Jewish (scriptures)**, and the Sabians and the Christians,—any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness,—on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve (*Surah* 5:59,66-69; cf. 2:62).³⁴

And if thou (Muhammad) art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read **the Scripture (that was) before thee**. Verily the Truth from thy Lord hath come unto thee. So be not thou of the waverers (*Surah* 10:95).³⁵

These verses from the Quran provide confirmation of Muhammad's belief in the accuracy of the Law and the Gospel (cf. *Surah* 87:18-19; 6:155-158). They even appeal to a Jew, contemporary to Muhammad, who verified that the Quran confirmed the Scripture that preceded it. Indeed, the Quran claims to be in unison and harmony with, and complementary to, previous Scripture (the Bible).

The underlying thought in all of these Quranic verses is that the Quran is to be accepted, revered, and obeyed every bit as much as the previous Scriptures (i.e., the Bible). These verses are worded in such a way that they **assume** the legitimacy and acceptability of the Bible. The Quranic criticism directed against Jews (and Christians) is not that they corrupted their Scriptures (cf. *Surah* 7:169-170). Rather, they are criticized for not concluding that Muhammad and the Quran were the confirmatory sequel to the previous revelations of Jews and Christians. In fact, when the Jews insisted to Muhammad that they had been given sufficient knowledge by means of the Torah—an admission made by the Quran itself ["Again, We gave the Scripture unto Moses, complete for him who would do good, **an explanation of all things**, a guidance and a mercy, that they might believe in

the meeting with their Lord" (*Surah* 7:155)]—Muhammad responded with a new surah: "[I]f all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea, with seven more seas to help it, (were ink), the words of Allah could not be exhausted" (*Surah* 31:27).³⁶ If the Quran endorses the integrity of the Bible, and we have in existence manuscripts of the Bible that pre-date the Quran, then the accuracy and authenticity of the Bible stands vindicated—not only by the voluminous manuscript evidence—but **even by the Quran itself**.

To repeat: We can know that the Bible has been transmitted accurately through the centuries. The Bible is, in fact, the Word of God.

ENDNOTES

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- ² Philip Comfort (1990), *Early Manuscripts and Modern Translations of the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House), p. 4.
- ³ Portions of this section are drawn from Wayne Jackson (1989), "Was the Old Testament Transmitted Faithfully?" Apologetics Press, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=105&article=1140>.
- ⁴ Sir Frederic Kenyon (1939), *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode), pp. 69,88.
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- ⁹ F.F. Bruce (1960), *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand

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²⁸ J.I. Packer (1958), *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1976 reprint, p. 90, emp. added.

²⁹ As quoted in Packer, pp. 90-91.

³⁰ John Gilchrist (1986), *Muhammad and the Religion of Islam*, <http://answering-islam.org.uk/Gilchrist/Vol1/index.html>.

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³² Translation by Mohammed Pickthall (n.d.), *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: Mentor), emp. added.

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Does Balaam's Talking Donkey Prove That the Bible Is a Book of Fables?

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

OFTEN associated with the definition of a “fable” are talking animals, unnatural phenomena, and make-believe individuals, places, and things. Critics of the Bible are inclined to declare its contents as “fable” in view of the account of Balaam’s talking donkey. However, this dismissal is a premature conclusion that merits examination. The account, recorded in Numbers 22, reports that this non-Israelite pagan prophet manifested reluctance to speak God’s directives to the Moabite king Balak due to a greedy desire for gain (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11). His “perverse/reckless” way (Numbers 22:32, ESV) was confronted by God via Balaam’s donkey by enabling the beast to speak words to its master.

The fact is that this admittedly unusual incident differs in several particulars from the uninspired fairytales and fables that characterize mere human authors. Some commentators believe Balaam’s interaction with his donkey was simply a vision or trance-like state that only he experienced in his own mind.¹ But Jamieson rightly labels this viewpoint as “inadmissible” because of “the improbabil-

ity of a vision being described as an actual occurrence in the middle of a plain history.”² Indeed, the account does not possess the characteristics or qualities of a fictitious narrative. The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines “fable” as “1. A usually short narrative making an edifying or cautionary point and often employing as characters animals that speak and act like humans. 2. A story about legendary persons and exploits. 3. A falsehood; a lie.”³ Older dictionaries emphasize the fictitious nature of a fable: “A feigned story intended to enforce some moral precept; a fiction in general.”⁴ Webster’s original dictionary had “1. A feigned story or tale, intended to instruct or amuse; a fictitious narration intended to enforce some useful truth or precept.”⁵ The account of Balaam’s donkey does not match the definition of “fable.”

In the first place, as D.R. Dungan notes in his discussion of biblical hermeneutics, “a fable is an illustration made by attributing human qualities to animate and inanimate beings.... [T]he actors are selected from those beings which are **incompetent** to do such

things.... [U]nlike the parable, its actors are **unreal**,...made to act a fictitious part.”⁶ Balaam’s donkey was not an imaginary creature that possessed human capabilities comparable to Brer Rabbit or the tortoise and the hare. The characters in fables never existed, never will exist, and are never alleged to exist. In contrast, this donkey was an actual, literal donkey owned by Balaam and on which he had ridden many times (vs. 30). The donkey remained nothing more than a donkey both before and after the supernatural interlude. The animal was able to speak only because God directly intervened to communicate His rebuke to Balaam, using the donkey as **His** mouthpiece. As Matthew Henry explains: “God opened the mouth of the [donkey].... God enabled not only a dumb creature to speak, but a dull creature to speak to the purpose.”⁷ Or as Keil and Delitzsch note, God expressed Himself in “the rational words of human language, which an animal does not possess.”⁸ The donkey did not cease being a donkey, let alone become human in its nature—as do the characters in fables. Even the rationale offered was **God’s** argumentation intended to reason with Balaam and prod him to come to grips with his own irrational behavior and internal motives.

Comparable instances of the use of non-human vehicles of supernatural communication may be seen in Satan’s speech to Eve via a snake (Genesis 3:1ff.),⁹ as well as God speaking to Moses **from within** a burning bush (Exodus 3:4), and also speaking to Job **out of** a storm (Job 38:1; 40:1). In each of these instances, the harnessed

object (whether animate or inanimate) used by the speaker was purely a physical **medium** through which the speaker conveyed a message—unlike what happens in a fable. This understanding of the use of Balaam’s donkey is reinforced and supported by the inspired apostle Peter’s remark concerning Balaam: “but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a **dumb donkey speaking with a man’s voice** restrained the madness of the prophet” (2 Peter 2:16). The donkey did not speak with his **own** voice. Rather, God spoke using a **human** voice via the donkey. Other renderings of the Greek further support this conclusion. The NASB reads: “but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a **mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man**, restrained the madness of the prophet.” The NIV reads: “But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—a **beast without speech**—who spoke with a man’s voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.” The donkey did not function of its own accord—as do fictitious characters in fables. Rather, the donkey was merely being utilized by God to articulate the divine message. Like the burning bush, God enlisted the physical form of the animal to express Himself to Balaam. As Augustine explained: “God did not convert the soul of the [donkey] into that of a reasonable being, but, as it pleased Him, made her to utter sounds to restrain Balaam’s folly.”¹⁰

Interestingly, the Bible does, in fact, contain a smattering of fable. However, its use is easily distinguishable from the erroneous use alleged by skeptics. For example, Jotham related a fable in Judges

9:6-21 and Jehoshaphat told a fable in 2 Kings 14:8-10. But even in these biblically rare instances of this type of figurative discourse, the fables are nothing more than literary devices used by the speakers to press their contemporaries with specific truths. The Bible nowhere portrays itself as fable. Rather, it purports to convey actual history.

In the second place, the Bible is filled with historical accounts of miraculous and supernatural events. The evidence indicates that the Universe had to be miraculously (i.e., **supernaturally**) created by an intelligent **supernatural** Being. Supernatural phenomena, therefore, **have occurred** in the past in connection with the activity of the supernatural Creator. The Bible, itself, has supernatural qualities that prove it to be from God.¹¹ Since we know that supernatural phenomena have occurred in the past and that the Bible can be verified as being the product of the supernatural God of the Universe, if the Bible says that “the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey” so that it talked, then, we can **know** that it talked—albeit, supernaturally. As Seraphim explained:

The stumblingblock...lies in the reasonable speech of an unreasoning and speechless ass...expressed in the form of human speech, of which animals are not capable.... [T]he fact remains clearly indubitable that the ass spoke in a language comprehensible to Balaam, and that this was a **supernatural** event.... The speech of the ass was an act of Divine Omnipotence.¹²

Indeed, “the episode moves, from beginning to end, on **miraculous** ground.”¹³

While mere fables cannot be verified with actual evidence,

the claims of Scripture rest upon mounds of evidence that substantiate them—both the natural and supernatural. If God could speak the entire physical realm into existence (Psalm 33:6,9), if He could create a physical body out of dirt and breathe into it a human spirit, endowing that individual with an intellect and ability to speak (Genesis 2:7ff.), if He could part a sea (Exodus 14:21; Hebrews 11:29) and rain down burning sulfur to destroy the cities of the plain (Genesis 19:24)—and the list goes on and on—then God could easily cause a brute beast momentarily to speak His words.

In the third place, the people, places, and events recorded in Scripture have proven time and again to be a matter of **history**—not fiction—firmly distinguishing its contents from make-believe fables.¹⁴ Even in the context of Numbers 22, the account gives no indication whatever that it is conveying mythical events. In fact, several features of the narrative have been **historically authenticated**, including the plains of Moab¹⁵ (vss. 1,4,7,8,10,14,21,36), the Jordan¹⁶ (vs. 1), Jericho¹⁷ (vs. 1), the Amorites¹⁸ (vs. 2), Midian¹⁹ (vss. 4,7), Pethor²⁰ (vs. 5), Egypt (vss. 5,11), Arnon²¹ (vs. 36), Kirjath-huzoth²² (vs. 39), and Bamoth Baal²³ (vs. 41). We’re not talking here of “Neverland” or other imaginary realms or mythical peoples, but actual, historically verifiable places and peoples, cultures and countries. The episode of Balaam’s talking donkey is ensconced firmly in the midst of **actual history**.²⁴

The more one studies the Bible—with an open and honest heart (Luke 8:15)—the more one is struck with the wonder of divine

inspiration. The self-authenticating nature of Scripture will inevitably drive the impartial person to the unalterable conclusion: the Bible is the Word of God.²⁵

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For example, see "Dissertation V: On the History and Character of Balaam" in John Jortin (1809), *Six Dissertations upon Different Subjects* (London: Richard Taylor), pp. 142ff. See also "Ass of Balaam" in John McClintock and James Strong (1879), *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1970 reprint), 1:477, and William Smith (1868), *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed H.B. Hackett (New York: Hurd & Houghton), 1:227-228.
- ² Robert Jamieson in Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, and David Brown (1882), *A Commentary: Critical, Practical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments* (Toledo, OH: Jerome B. Names), p. 247.
- ³ <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=fable>.
- ⁴ Samuel Johnson (1777), *A Dictionary of the English Language* (London: J. Mifflin), vol. 1.
- ⁵ Noah Webster (1828), *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse), 1:78.
- ⁶ D.R. Dungan (1888), *Hermeneutics* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light), pp. 244-245.
- ⁷ Matthew Henry (1961), *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), p. 166.
- ⁸ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (1976 reprint), *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1:171.
- ⁹ See Gleason Archer (1974), *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press), p. 201: "The serpent was a mere guise through which the tempter spoke to them." The Hebrew term translated "serpent" is the normal word for "snake." See also Revelation 12:9,15; 20:2.
- ¹⁰ As translated in Seraphim (1900), *The Soothsayer Balaam* (London: Rivingtons), p. 147. See also Charles Taylor (1832), "Ass of Balaam," in *Calmet's Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (London: Holdsworth & Ball), p. 113.
- ¹¹ See the "Inspiration of the Bible" section at apologeticspress.org.
- ¹² pp. 146-147, emp. added.
- ¹³ Marcus Kalisch (1877), *Bible Studies, Part I: The Prophecies of Balaam*

(London: Longman, Greens & Co.), p. 142, emp. added.

- ¹⁴ See the "Factual Accuracy" section of "Inspiration of the Bible" at ApologeticsPress.org.
- ¹⁵ See "The Archaeology of Moab" (1997) in *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 60[4]:194-248, December.
- ¹⁶ See Jeremy Hutton (2019), "Jordan River in Israelite History," <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/443/en/places/related-articles/jordan-river-in-israelite-history>; also William Francis Lynch (1849), *Narrative Of The United States Expedition To The River Jordan And The Dead Sea* (Philadelphia, PA: Lea & Blanchard).
- ¹⁷ "History of Archaeological Exploration at Tell es-Sultan/Jericho" (2015), Rome "La Sapienza" University, <http://www.lasapienzatojericho.it/History.php>.
- ¹⁸ "Amorite People," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Amorite>.
- ¹⁹ Jacqueline Schaalje (2005), "Archaeology in Israel: Timna," *Jewish Magazine*, October, <http://www.jewishmag.com/95mag/timna/timna.htm>; Isidore Singer and M. Seligsohn (1906), "Midian and Midianites," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10804-midian-and-midianites>.
- ²⁰ See William Shea (1989), "The Inscribed Tablets from Tell Deir 'Alla (Part 2)," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Summer, 27[2]:97-119, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://en.wikipedia.org/&httpsredir=1&article=1911&context=auss>.
- ²¹ See Bruce Routledge (2004), *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity, Archaeology* (Philadelphia, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press), pp. 44ff.
- ²² M.G. Easton (1893), *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper &

Brothers), p. 410, <https://archive.org/stream/illustratedbible00east#page/n11/mode/2up>.

- ²³ George Smith (1903), *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (New York: A.C. Armstrong & Son), p. 562; Morris Jastrow, Jr. and Frants Buhl (1906), "Bamoth-Baal ('The Heights of Baal')," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2431-bamoth-baal>.
- ²⁴ See Edward Wharton (1977), *Christianity: A Clear Case of History!* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Book House).
- ²⁵ For more on the supernatural qualities of the Bible, see Kyle Butt (2007), *Behold! The Word of God* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).

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NOTE FROM

The Editor



New Book on Mormonism

The central purpose of Apologetics Press, from its inception over 40 years ago, has been to produce materials that defend the Christian Faith. More specifically, A.P. has specialized in providing assistance in combating atheism, evolution, and skepticism. The staff has spent countless hours researching and refuting those who attack the existence of God, the deity of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, the Genesis account of Creation, and the truthfulness of Christianity. Four decades later, that focus remains unchanged.

In the midst of this spiritual “warfare” (1 Timothy 1:18), we also feel the pressing need to occasionally address unbiblical notions within Christendom that threaten people’s spiritual safety. This intention lies behind the development of our “What the Bible Says About...” book series. “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). We have no desire to offend, insult, or hurt anyone.

On the other hand, to be faithful to God, we must be about the business of “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) on vital topics that affect salvation.

With these principles in mind, we have added another volume to the series titled *What the Bible Says About the Mormon Church*. We believe you will find the volumes already produced in this series to be gentle, loving, and tactful in the treatment of denominational doctrines. Our sole intention is to encourage all people to lay aside human ideas and personal preferences, and to embrace God’s truth. Jesus said: “The truth will make you free” (John 8:32). That’s all we want—for ourselves and for others. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). Please consider using these volumes to assist you in teaching others God’s truth.

Dave Miller

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for More Details**